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ABSTRACT

This action research project described a program for increasing student skills in writing. The targeted population consisted of fifth grade academically talented, regular education, and inclusion students in a middle class, western suburb of a Midwestern city. The inadequacy of student writing skills was documented through writing samples, local assessments, teacher surveys, and student surveys. Analysis of probable cause data revealed that teachers report student frustration, lack of "seeing real-life" connection, and inadequate writing skills. The teacher specifically reported that limited time, previous failures, a lack of home modeling, and lack of curriculum integration fostered poor writing skills. A review of solution strategies suggested by experts in the field of writing, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of four major categories of intervention. These categories include goal setting conferences, cooperative learning, graphic organizers, and use of rubrics. Students made enormous progress in using graphic organizers. They showed increased enjoyment of writing and had an easier time starting to write. Students developed their habits of goal setting, which will influence their writing process in the future. Further, students became proficient at peer editing which assisted the role of writer and editor. (Contains 29 references, and one table and six figures of data. Appendixes contain survey instruments, rubrics, checklists, graphic organizers, and practice sentences.) (RS)

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ED 420 874

IMPROVING WRITING THROUGH THE USE OF VARIED STRATEGIES

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University & IRI/Skylight
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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for increasing student skills in writing. The targeted population consists of fifth grade academically talented, regular education, and inclusion students in a middle class western suburb of a Midwestern city. The inadequacy of today's student writing skills will be documented though writing samples, local assessments, teacher surveys, and student surveys.

Analysis of probable cause data reveals that teachers report student frustration, lack of seeing a real-life connection, and inadequate writing skills. The teachers specifically report that limited time, previous failures, a lack of home modeling, and lack of curriculum integration fosters poor writing skills.

A review of solution strategies suggested by experts in the field of writing, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of four major categories of intervention. These categories include goal setting conferences, cooperative learning, graphic organizers, and use of rubrics.

Students made enormous progress in using graphic organizers. They showed increased enjoyment of writing and had an easier time starting to write. Students developed their habits of goal setting, which will influence their writing process in the future. Further, students became proficient at peer editing which assisted the role of writer and editor.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 - PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT..... 1

General Statement of the Problem..... 1

Immediate Problem Context..... 1

Local Setting..... 2

Surrounding Community..... 5

National Context..... 6

CHAPTER 2 - PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION..... 9

Problem Evidence..... 9

Probable Cause.....14

CHAPTER 3 - THE SOLUTION STRATEGY.....18

Literature Review.....18

Project Outcomes.....22

Solution Components.....23

Action Plan.....23

Methods of Assessment.....25

CHAPTER 4 - PROJECT RESULTS.....26

Historical Description of the Interventions.....26

Interventions.....26

Presentation and Analysis of Results.....29

Conclusion and Recommendations.....34

REFERENCES.....38

APPENDICES

Appendix A - Parent Letter.....40

Appendix B - Teacher Writing Survey.....41

Appendix C - Pre and post Student Survey.....42

Appendix D - Prompt Administering Directions.....43

Appendix E - Writing Prompt.....44

Appendix F - Writer's Checklist.....45

Appendix G - Notes Page.....46

Appendix H - Writing Booklet.....47

Appendix I - NCA Rubric.....48

Appendix J - Writing Profile.....49

Appendix K - Publishing Center.....50

Appendix L - Steps to Understanding.....51

Appendix M - Persuasive Writing Prompt.....52

Appendix N - Teacher Directions for Persuasive Prompt...53

Appendix O - Venn Diagram.....54

Appendix P - T-Chart.....55

Appendix Q - I Chart.....56

Appendix R - Webbing.....57

Appendix S - Student Writing Self-Assessment.....58

Appendix T - Scholastic Daily Language Practice (1).....59

Appendix U - Scholastic Daily Language Practice (2).....60

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted fifth grade classrooms exhibit writing attitudes that interfere with improvement in writing skills. Evidence for the existence of the problem comprises student writing samples, local assessments, teacher surveys, and student surveys.

Immediate Problem Context

The school site is located in a western suburb of a major metropolitan city in the Midwest. It has a total enrollment of 551 students and houses grades kindergarten, 3, 4, 5, and early childhood. The site is part of a unit school district that has a total of: two elementary, one junior high school, and one high school. The site population comes from one of the district's elementary schools. From the total number of students, the following is a breakdown of ethnic characteristics: 82.5% White, 7.6% Asian/Pacific, 5.8% Black, 4.1% Hispanic, and no Native

Americans. The site has an attendance rate of 95.9% with no chronic truants. There is a rate of 10.9% student mobility. The site has an average class size of 25.0 (School Report Card, 1996). The following minutes per day are allocated for instruction: 120 for language arts, 60 for math, 30 for science, and 30 for social studies (Teacher Handbook, 1997).

The site's district has a total number of 122 teachers. The average teaching experience is 13.7 years. Sixty percent of the teachers have Master's degrees or higher. There are 8 administrators and 84 secretarial, clerical, custodial, teacher aides, and library personnel. The 1995-1996 operating expense per pupil in the district was $7,331 (District Handbook, 1997). From the total number of district teachers 72.8% of them are female, while 27.2% are male. The district's teacher racial/ethnic background breaks down as following: 99.0% White, 1.0% Black, and no Asian/Pacific Islanders, Hispanic, and Native American. The average teacher's salary in the district is $48,788 while the average administrator's salary is $81,215 (School Report Card, 1996).

Local Setting

The school site is a kindergarten, grades 3, 4, and 5 facility with six sections of each grade. An early childhood program is provided twice daily. Eleven years ago the district reorganized from three neighborhood elementary schools to one

primary building for grades one and two. The second elementary building is the research site. The school board at that time felt that having grade level teams all in one building would facilitate communication, curriculum, and collaboration. This reorganization resulted in increased busing for the students. Currently there are ten bus routes and 80% of the students are bused. Since the reorganization the faculty turnover rate has been stable with less than 2% turnover. The current principal is beginning her third year at the school. The superintendent is beginning his first year. The district hired a curriculum director, a staff development coordinator, and a technology services director this year.

The site facilitates regular education with a full inclusion program. This inclusion program features all children with Individualized Education Programs (IEP). Children with special needs ranging from learning disabled, behaviorally disordered, autistic, health impaired, educable mentally handicapped, and physically challenged are mainstreamed into the regular classroom for the entire day. Additional support is provided by inclusion facilitators and teacher aides. Last year the district had formed a Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) committee to address teachers' concerns about inclusion. The committee is continuing to address inclusion issues this year. In addition, the site offers an academically talented program in

language arts and math. Title I services are also available for children who do not qualify for special education services but are below grade level in academic areas. Speech and social work services are provided both in whole group situations or in a one-to-one pull out program. An English as a Second Language teacher is shared with the other schools in the district. Other instructional programs include art, computer literacy, physical education, music, and library classes.

Currently, the site features strong emphasis on technology including intensive teacher in-service. The school board offers additional in-district and out-of-district classes. The school board has offered monetary incentives to assist in the purchase of a home computer for teachers involved in the program. The site houses two staffed computer labs. One lab is used for instruction in technology. The second lab is used for classroom teachers to integrate technology with current curriculum. Each classroom has three computers and a printer with software appropriate for the grade level.

The site uses Scholastic Literacy Place as a totally integrated language arts program: reading, English, writing, and spelling. The children use daily journal writing, and writing related to the theme of the story read that week. The site currently is undergoing the North Central Association

accreditation process in the area of student writing. Another goal focuses on a caring attitude among students.

The Surrounding Community

The most recent community census showed a population of 19,512 residents. From that total, the following is a summary of ethnic/racial background: White 90.6%, Black 2.8%, American Indian 0.2%, Asian/Pacific Islander 5.7%, Hispanic 2.7%, and Other 0.8% (Village Profile, 1993).

The median family income is $68,425. There are a total of 4,066 single-family homes, and 4,634 multiple family units. There are approximately 2.77 people per household. The median home value is $189,311. The average rent is $731. The average age of a person living in this community is 31.0 years. From the total number of males in the area, 491 of them are divorced. From the total number of females in the area, 747 are divorced (Village Profile, 1993).

Parents are very supportive of the school and the teachers. The majority of parents and guardians make at least one contact with the teachers during the school year. A parent advisory committee has been formed this year. Parents give support to the school through activities including Book Fair, Fun Fair, Publishing Center, monthly Market Days, clothing sales, social activities, voluntary programs, scouting programs, Learning Fair, and various fund-raisers.

National Context

There is a national concern that writing skills of students are inadequate. "A National Assessment in Writing: The Writing Report", (1986) revealed three conclusions (Mitchell, 1988). These conclusions were:

1. Even with an increased interest in teaching writing, students have reported few changes in the quantity of writing since 1974.
2. Students average only three to four papers over six weeks in all subject areas.
3. When teachers assign less, students write less. Students do not write often enough because teachers at all levels and in all subjects do not recognize that writing can be an effective tool in the learning process. It is a complex skill that involves all levels of comprehension.

Another national writing concern is that students are deficient in problem solving skills and in higher order thinking skills (Congressional Budget Office Study, 1987). Educators have placed blame on instruction that has emphasized rote skills, and fact-based instruction. The problem lies in the fact that many teachers never move beyond the level of literal information, allowing students to use higher-order thinking skills. The teaching of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, is done in isolation, as if they were separate and unrelated (Farnan,

1989). In 1983, the Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching concluded that a basic Language Arts program for all students should include a study of those consequential ideas, experiences, and traditions common to all of us by virtue of our membership in the human family at a particular moment in history (Boyer, 1983). As a result, teachers have to develop new curriculum and revise their methods of instruction.

In researching the 50 major teacher-preparing institutions in the United States, Graves (as cited in Murray, 1995) discovered 24 of our states do not offer a course of writing for teachers-in-training. Graves says one simple in-service workshop will not assist teachers.

Children's motivation to write is a complex issue affected by many factors. Researchers have found that teacher's attitude and actions, the type of text a child reads and write, and the context in which writing occurs impact on a child's motivation and attitude to write. Also, for a student to be involved in any activity, an individual must feel competent at accomplishing it. Students in the study expressed a high level of interest when they were able to choose their topic (Codling, Gambrell, Graham, Kennedy, & Palmer, 1996).

In conclusion, writing is a complex set of processes and attitudes. Changes in the methods of writing instruction will be initiated by educators. Curriculum integration of writing and

thinking processes must be emphasized. Finally students just need to write more following the aged adage of "practice makes perfect."

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

A parent notification letter (see Appendix A) was distributed at curriculum night in early September. This letter explained the writing action research project.

Twenty-one teachers at the site (see Appendix B) and 70 grade five students were surveyed (see Appendix C). This was done in a one-week time period during the first month of school. Questions in the surveys measured feelings towards writing using yes or no responses. Sixty percent of the teacher surveys were returned while one hundred percent of the student surveys were completed. The surveys were developed by the authors of this paper.

Scores of the third grade state goal assessment writing program for the years 1994-1997 at the site were well above state standards (see Figure 1).

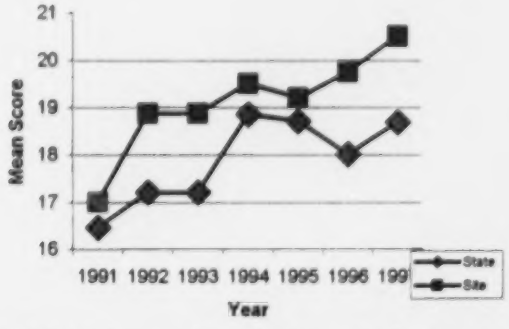

FIGURE 1. Scores of the third grade state goal assessment writing program

The results of teacher and student surveys, however, indicated problems in writing that had nothing to do with the state test performance standards.

In analyzing student and teacher surveys (see Figure 2 below, and Figure 3 on page 11), different viewpoints were found between teachers and students. These areas include editing and revising, the use of graphic organizers, rubrics, and reference materials.

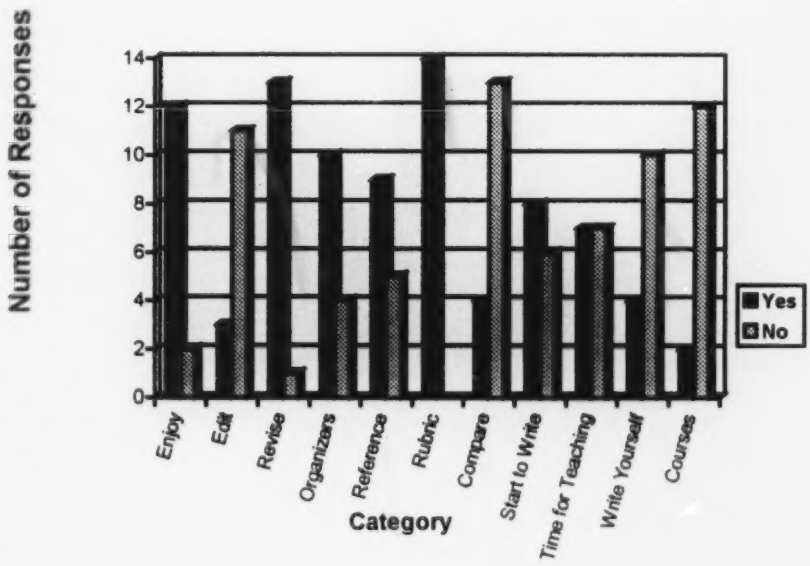

FIGURE 2.

Teacher Writing Survey

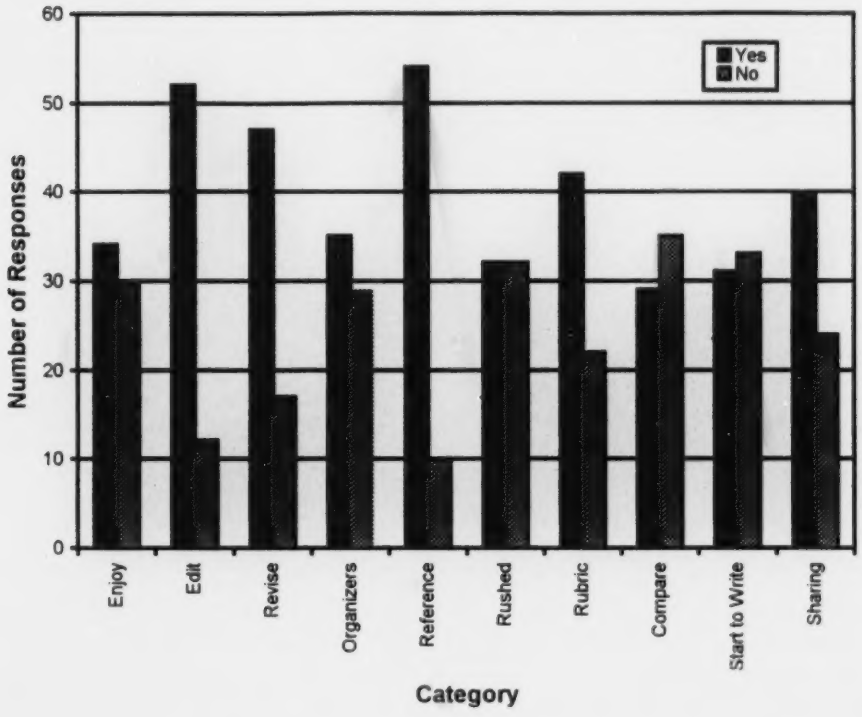

FIGURE 3.

Student Writing Pre-survey

Students strongly believed they used the editing and revising processes while teachers strongly disagreed. This could be due to the fact that students are not aware of the clear and complete criteria for accurate revisions.

In discussing the issues of graphic organizers and rubrics, the researchers decided that the terminology in the survey was too sophisticated for the students. They may have used graphic organizers and rubrics in previous writing experiences and grade levels, but were not familiar with the terms in the survey.

After the closure of this action research, the students should become more familiar with these terms.

Use of reference materials was another area of discrepancy. One hundred percent of the students claimed to use reference materials, while only 21 percent of the teachers agreed with the students. The researchers believe that teacher expectation and student use does not correspond. Teachers do not observe frequent use of the dictionary, thesaurus, and spell checker. Occasional use of these materials seems to be enough for the students.

In reviewing the teacher survey (see Figure 2), student evaluation of writing is a key problem. Teachers believe students do not know how to use rubrics to evaluate writing. In addition, students do not compare their writing pieces to see improvement. The teacher survey correlated with many findings of the national context research. As indicated in the teachers' survey, teachers overwhelmingly did not write as the children write. They also did not have a course on teaching writing in their undergraduate college courses. These two aspects are seen as weaknesses in improving student writing according to authors from the national content research.

The researchers gave a similar survey to students and analyzed the differences between boys and girls (Figure 4).

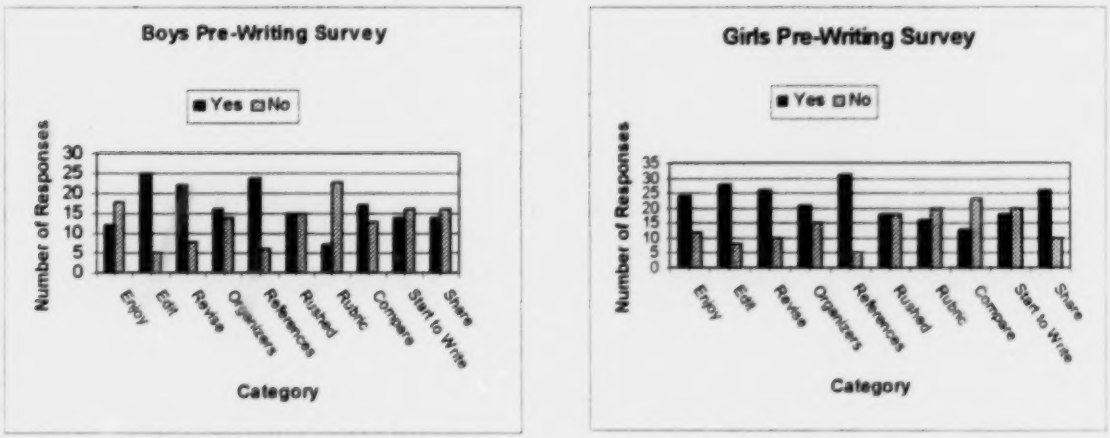

FIGURE 4.

Boys and Girls Pre-Writing Survey Comparison

The results of the comparison survey shows that boys did not enjoy writing as much as girls, yet they compared their writing pieces to see improvement more than girls did. Boys did not edit, nor revise, as much as the girls did. A discrepancy also existed in the use of reference materials. Girls perceived that they used reference materials much more than the boys. Girls liked to share their work, while boys did not.

In late September, the targeted student population was given instructions and a prompt (see Appendix D, E, F, and G) by the teacher. Students then began writing and the samples were collected. They were scored by using a teacher-made rubric (see Appendix J), and analyzed by the teachers.

Probable Causes

Site Based

During the school year 1993-1994, the site's teaching staff saw a need to improve student writing because of low state test scores (see Figure 1). Writing was selected as a staff development focus for the next three years. In-services were planned to address specific weaknesses as indicated by the state standards. Several in-service training seminars centering on curriculum integration with writing were held during 1993. A writing consultant was utilized. In addition, state goal assessment writing strategies were presented to the staff as tools to enhance student performance and teachers' understanding of state goal assessment expectations. Those goals centered on the parts of writing: focus, elaboration, and conventions in the areas of persuasive, expository, and narrative writing. Scores were determined by a state rating system outside the site. Overall site composite scores were released in the fall to the public, and individual student scores were released to the parent and site teachers.

In 1994-1995, a different writing consultant was employed. The consultant's focus was to provide literature for inspiring creative writing. Continued efforts developed student and teachers' expertise in their performance of state writing

skills. This consultant was hired because the site's staff development committee determined the teachers needed more teaching strategies for narrative and expository writing.

Several aspects were focused upon in the 1995-1996-school term with a third and different consultant. Aspects included writing to learn, assisting at-risk writers, and publishing students' work. A publishing center for student writing opened in the fall of 1996 (see Appendix I). Kindergarten teachers requested and received training in journal writing for that age bracket.

Effects of the staff development included increased state assessment scores during certain years. Instructors became more knowledgeable in the process of writing. Topics covered included the use of mini-lessons, power writing, and graphic organizers. These components have resulted in additional student writing in the classroom. When the time arrived to adopt a new reading series, the focus was towards publishing companies that integrated reading and writing.

Literature Based

Techniques for students to become stronger writers are suggested by Spandel (1996). Spandel believes because students have not learned clear and complete criteria for what constitutes good writing, they are frustrated in their writing efforts. How do students learn these criteria? The same way

teachers learn them: by using them to assess other people's writing. Spandel also believes writing begins with sharing and assessing writing that is anonymous. With practice students can become strong self-assessors (Spandel, 1996).

Power (1997) addresses the issue of class size and time management. She suggests helping students work independently during writing time, monitoring and assessing their own progress. Self-assessment tools are usually part of commercial literacy programs, but she feels they are confusing to students and do not relate to their particular needs. Her suggestion is to have teachers create their own rubrics, with help from their students (Power, 1997).

Researchers Fitzgerald and Markham (1987) conducted a study to show children needed clearly targeted instruction in order to write well. They felt students could write better if they were taught exact revision skills. A group of average sixth grade students were divided into two groups. The control group read good literature. They were testing the popular view that good readers make good writers. This "osmosis" theory would make students better writers. The experimental group received direct instruction in revision skills for 13 days during one month. The trained group scored 79% higher for seeing more discrepancies. For five kinds of revision, all trained students outperformed untrained students. The trained students made 42% more revisions

(Fitzgerald & Markham, 1987). An interesting aspect of the study revealed that the responsibility is shifted from the teacher to the student. Peer tutoring forces students to take turns being the audience and the critic. All of this helps them to decide whether the message is appropriate and effective, or whether it needs to be revised.

It is suggested by Graves (1994) that teachers consider beginning their own writing portfolio. Things included in this portfolio could include written text from other people besides their own writing. This could include photocopies of favorite books, letters from students, and Faxes from friends. If teachers write with their students they will have many short pieces to include in their portfolio. This would be an appropriate place to keep journals on activities in the classroom (Graves, 1994). Teachers do not have to be good writers in order to teach good writing (Calkins, 1994). As long as teachers can draw on good memories they will always have unlimited motivating activities for writing. When students resist writing, it's usually because writing has been treated as little more than a place to display their command of spelling, grammar, and penmanship. It does not have to be that way. If a teacher wants to establish conditions in which students want to write, the teacher has to share memories. The students then will want to write about their memories.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Current research gives many strategies for improving student-writing skills. The strategies are as varied as the writers themselves. "Content before mechanics!" (Wilcox, 1996) is a phrase many educators use to try to focus their students more on content. Students claim they do not know what to look for. Too much of the peer conferencing time is spent on correcting misspelled words, arguing over commas, and capital letters. Dismuke (1986, pg. 23) has said that not everyone is a budding literary talent, "but most people can be taught to write effectively." Although research has shown that isolated skill and drill grammar lessons do not transfer to actual writing performance, many classrooms in our nation still use that method. Grammar and mechanics are best mastered in the context of actual writing.

Students need real audiences and a classroom context of shared learning (Zemelman, 1993). The listening, talking, and responses taking place in a cooperative group, not only help students improve their skills but provide motivation.

In an interview, Graves was asked what can teachers do to foster successful writing programs in their classrooms. Graves suggested that educators collaborate and support each other. Teachers can greatly benefit from cooperative learning as much as students can. Collaboration helps teachers help one another (Murray, 1995).

Findings from Johnson and Johnson, Slavin, and Kagan suggest that there is "a strong positive relationship between the ability to think critically, to perform higher-order thinking and to think more creatively when learning occurs in group settings. These higher functions have been viewed as beneficial by-products of cooperative learning" (Bellanca & Fogarty, 1991, pg. V).

Calkins (1986) states

> It is essential that children are deeply involved in writing, that they share their texts with others, and they perceive themselves as authors. A sense of authorship comes from the struggle to put something vital into print, and from seeing one's own printed words reach the hearts and minds of readers. (p.3)

One way for children and teachers to become deeply involved in writing as Calkins suggests is to have conferences and goal-setting sessions (Calkins, 1986). In order for young writers to

learn to ask questions about their writing, conferences should be held. Children make decisions on what to write, wonder, remember more and rethink their ideas. Murray (1992) likens writing to a conversation between two workers muttering to each other on a bench. "The self speaks, the other self listens and considers. The self makes the other self-evaluate." (p.43). This is the beginning of self-conferencing.

It is difficult to learn to confer well and to manage conferencing in the classroom, but effective conferring is possible and worth the struggle (Calkins, 1994). Klein (1996) suggests bi-monthly meetings for three to five minutes. These meetings should focus on specific needs and concerns. A portfolio could house writing pieces and comments about work from teachers, parents, and peers. This could be used as a clear picture of growth.

In a good conference, the teacher speaks 80% of the time (Graves, 1994). Each conference should end with what the child should do next. Also, the value of conferencing allows for an avenue to expand, clarify, and structure thought process. The teachers can observe specific individual difficulties and give skilled instruction tailored to individual needs (Finklestein, 1992). Goal setting can be a part of a conference (Billingsley, 1995). A student could use a goal setting sheet with statements of what the goal is and how to attain that goal.

In a study using a group of 30 special education students, Young (1993) discovered that reluctant writers got over the hurdle of not having anything to say in writing. She found that a directive prewriting activity with an important graphic organizer leads her students to success with poetic imagery (Gill, 1993).

Specific visual organizers enable students to see their thinking. Graphic organizers allow students to play with their ideas, to explore, and to inquire (Bellanca, 1990).

Using graphic organizers facilitates writing by structuring information and arranging important aspects of concepts or topics. With graphic organizers, both visual and verbal information is involved, thus benefiting students with a wide variety of learning styles and ranges of ability. One important function of learning theory pinpoints the use of graphic organizers as allowing the student to see how concepts are connected, and this makes it more easily understood. Graphic organizers in the organizational pattern are utilized by students in the various styles of writing. Examples include main concept and its ranks or levels of subconcepts, in a central idea, category or class with supporting facts such as characteristics or examples, and finally in series of events in succession (Bromley, Irwin-DeVitis & Modlo, 1995).

When students create and discuss a graphic representation of information, they reread, talk, reason and see relationships that were not obvious before. Graphic organizers aid writing by supporting planning and revising. They are effective ways to brainstorm, plan, and organize writing. Also, by using a graphic organizer, the writer can decide on the sequence of writing. The graphic organizer supports revision as well, allowing the writer to see what may have been accidentally left out (Bromley, Irwin-DeVitis & Modelo, 1995).

Much literature was found on the use of computers as a motivating force in writing. Editing on computers is also made easier for students (Fitzgerald & Markham, 1987). Students can become daring and creative in their writing. Using the computer's thesaurus can enhance vocabulary development. Using the spell checker helps students avoid errors and helps them focus on the communicative purpose of writing.

Routman (1991) suggests writers need chunks of time, choice, response, and instruction in context. She also calls for modeling, reading, authentic purpose, and opportunity to take risks in a safe environment.

We need to write. It is an expression of our inner thoughts, ideas, and feelings. We use writing in all phases of our lives. We use writing to express concisely, share, work, and relax.

Project Outcome

As a result of our intervention strategies during the period of September 1997 to February 1998, the fifth grade students from the targeted class will increase their ability in writing skills as measured by teacher surveys, student surveys, writing samples with rubrics and goal setting.

Solution Components

In order to accomplish the terminal objective, the following processes are necessary and will be created: a series of strategies and learning activities that address writing skills and assessment tools reflecting these decisions will be constructed.

Action Plan

The changes in strategies will include emphasis on graphic organizers, cooperative learning, and conferencing. The implementation plan allows for all three strategies to be presented during the 1997-1998 school year, from September to February.

I. Teachers will instruct students on the use of six different graphic organizers.

   A. Steps to Understanding - Sept./Oct. (Appendix L)

   B. Webbing - Oct. (Appendix R)

   C. T-Chart - Nov. (Appendix P)

   D. I Chart - Dec. (Appendix Q)

E. Venn Diagram - Sept. (Appendix R)

F. Scholastic Writing Activities - weekly

II. Teachers will introduce five aspects of cooperative learning.

A. Author Circles - for prewriting and in-progress writing activities

B. Peer Tutors - weekly Daily Oral Language (DOL)

C. Editing Partners - once a month for composing in progress writing

D. Anonymous Writers - once per semester for evaluation purposes

E. Checklists - periodically as indicated by student need

III. Students will implement four aspects of conferencing.

A. Scheduled Conference - bi-monthly

B. Unscheduled Conference - teacher walk around during writing

C. Goal Setting Conference - focusing one area for two week time period

D. Peer Conference - post writing evaluation as needed

IV. Students will celebrate their writing.

A. Publishing Center - yearly

B. Blank Book Writing - yearly

V. Teachers will use rubrics to assess writing.

A. Teacher-made NCA rubric

B. Benchmarks from Scholastic Publishing Company

Methods of Assessment

Several data collection methods will be used to assess the effects of these interventions. The action plan will be evaluated in February, 1998. The other assessments will include the North Central Association accreditation rubric, goal setting conference, post-student surveys, post-writing samples, and teacher observation comments.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of Intervention

The terminal objective of the intervention addressed a program for increasing student skills in writing. Indications were that students experienced frustration. There was also a lack of seeing real-life connections in their writing, and students had inadequate writing skills.

Therefore the terminal objective stated:

1. A review of solution strategies by experts in the field of writing
2. An analysis of the problem setting
3. Five major interventions
   a. graphic organizers
   b. cooperative learning
   c. goal setting conferences
   d. celebration of writing
   e. use of rubrics

Interventions

The researchers' first objective was to see if graphic organizers made a difference in the quality of the student's

writing. They wanted to determine if organizers made the initiation of writing easier and if students would continue to use them without being prompted by teacher.

The researchers used graphic organizers with narrative, persuasive, and expository styles of writing and integrated them into language arts and social studies instruction. The researchers taught the steps to understanding graphic organizers (see Appendix L) to help students plan a research paper. Students used this graphic organizer with their persuasive writing prompt (see Appendix M and N) which asked for their opinion of a 12-month school year.

Venn diagrams (see Appendix O) and T-chart (see Appendix P) graphic organizers were used by students to compare and contrast in the language arts areas. Students in social studies implemented compare and contrast strategies using these two graphic organizers and the I-chart (see Appendix Q). The I-chart was used to assist students in organizing their reading of a text into a summary. Webbing (see Appendix R) was used for character traits in reading and used to help students understand main idea and details in social studies.

Cooperative learning was the second intervention implemented by the researchers. One cooperative learning strategy was author circles, student conversations to brainstorm for ideas during the pre-writing stage. Students could also use

the strategy when they encountered writer's mental block, or when they needed to get an opinion of their content in writing. Peer tutors and editing partners were also used for the editing and revising stages of writing and weekly editing of five sentences. The third strategy, anonymous writers, were teacher-selected pieces of student writing used as models of novice, apprentice, and proficient benchmarks. One researcher used editing checklists (see Appendix F) for the revision and editing stages of writing.

The researchers had planned to conduct bimonthly scheduled conferences, but time constraints and North Central Association accreditation demands interfered with this strategy. However, unscheduled conferences were held between teacher and student while the writing sessions were occurring. The researchers answered questions, provided modeling, and asked guiding questions. Goal-setting conferences were held with each student before writing to determine an area for their improvement. This was called the student writing performance self-assessment (see Appendix S). Conferences were held with each student before and correlated with the site's North Central Association accreditation process.

The fourth intervention used by the researchers was celebrating the children's writing. Two researchers allowed their students to participate in the site's publishing center

where they chose a favorite piece from their writing portfolio and created a book (see Appendix K).

The publishing center was started in 1994 by a group of site teachers who investigated other schools' publishing centers. The center is now staffed by student and parent volunteers who edit, organize, type, and bind student writing into book form. The third researcher allowed the students to create a book using the blank book process, a pre-manufactured book purchased by the site. The children wrote and illustrated their chosen piece in a bound blank book form.

The final intervention was the use of a rubric. The site's writing committee designed the rubric (see Appendix I) for the NCA process. This rubric was incorporated as an assessment for two pieces of student writing during the first quarter and third quarter. Items one through seven, 21, 22, and 25 of the rubric were not used by the researchers because they did not apply to the fifth grade level or genre of writing. Students did not see the rubric before writing.

Presentation and Analysis of Project Results

Several data collection methods were used to assess the effects of these interventions. They included the North Central Association accreditation rubric (see Appendix I), goal-setting conference, pre- and post-student surveys, post-writing samples, and teacher observation comments.

Two data collection methods pinpointed the use of graphic organizers. They were a pre- and post-student survey and the writing rubric designed for the North Central Association accreditation process.

The pre-survey showed 73% of the students felt they knew how to revise. The post-survey resulted in 88% feeling comfortable with revision. This shows a 15% increase. Editing knowledge stayed the same. The increase in graphic organizers was 27%, from 56% to 83%. The other areas showed insignifigant changes. Boys showed a 37% increase of enjoying while girls remained the same.

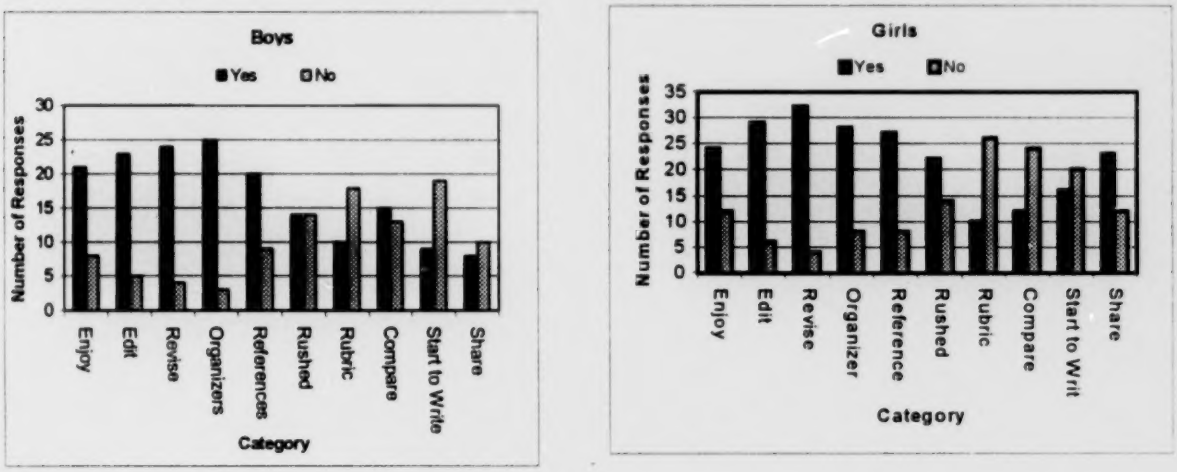

FIGURE 5.

Boys and Girls Post Writing Survey Comparison

Students also stated they used graphic organizers more frequently and had an easier time starting to write. Girls reported an increase in knowing how to revise.

Writing was assessed by the researchers who used the rubric. Researchers scored each other's students writing pieces to avoid bias. The researchers were looking for a percent of change in the rubric's total score from the first quarter narrative writing piece to the third quarter persuasive writing piece. The researchers found that 37 students increased their total rubric score, two remained the same, and 26 decreased. The overall increase of change was 10%.

In the area of graphic organizers, students were scored according to their use of organizers. Researchers compared the increase and decrease of usage of graphic organizers in both pieces. Results showed 48 students improved in using graphic organizers, 15 remained the same, and two decreased. The most often used graphic organizers were the steps for understanding or webbing strategy of graphic organizers.

A student self-assessment (see Appendix S) was used by the researchers to help students determine a writing goal. Students were given a pre-writing self-assessment and asked to select one goal they would like to improve. The assessment was returned to

the students for a post-analysis of their goal. The researchers discovered 50 of the 70 students, or 71%, achieved their goal.

The researchers found that 23 of the 70 students chose correct spelling as a goal and area for improvement on their self-assessment. Only 12 of the 23 students who chose spelling believed that their achieved their goal, while 11 did not achieve their goal. This also correlated with the NCA rubric item 23 on spelling which showed an improvement.

Very few students chose the goals of clear and logical opening, correct capitalization, or complete sentences. All students who chose clear and logical opening, correct capitalization, and complete sentences, reported achieving their goal. Eight other student chose a different goal not listed on the self-assessment, and five reported they achieved the goal.

An examination of the data found a correlation between strategies used from the action plan and the results of the student self-assessment and the NCA rubric. The researchers found that many of the items on the NCA rubric increased even though they were not on the action plan. The skills in this category that improved were standard mechanics, standard spelling, paragraphing, internal and external transitions, and second order support. The researchers believed strategies in the

action plan that contributed to this increase were cooperative learning and goal setting.

Another assessment was completed to analyze peer editing (see Appendix T and U). The sample population of fifth grade students was given two worksheets of five sentences each from Scholastic Daily Language Practice. These sentences contained grammar, mechanics, and spelling errors. The students edited the worksheets individually, and then peer edited the same worksheet on the next day. The results are presented in Table One.

Table 1.

Peer Editing Results

Scores	First Sample	Second Sample	Total
Increased Scores	30	47	77
Scores Remained Same	32	12	44
Decreased Scores	2	3	8

The first and second sample results were combined and showed 77 students increased their percentage of correct responses when they peer edited, 44 students remained the same and five students had lower scores. Many students that had the same score had 100 percent accuracy or few errors initially. The number of scores that decreased were not significant. The four students with Individualized Educational Program (IEP) showed significant gains. Students, who are placed in the site's

academically talented program, also showed significant gains. Seventeen students showed an increase in the second Scholastic Daily Language Practice than the first practice.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Researchers felt the graphic organizer Steps to Understanding (see Appendix L) was the most effective and popular with students. There was a dramatic increase in the number of students using a graphic organizer from the first writing assessment to the second assessment. A connection was observed by the researchers that the boys had an easier time beginning to write and enjoyed writing more because of using graphic organizers.

The researchers plan to continue use of graphic organizers because they result in students staying focused, writing with more details, and second order support. They were also useful in helping students understand cross-curricular integration. Graphic organizers helped students who have IEPs, those who find writing a challenge, and English As A Second Language students because it helped them stay organized. These researchers plan to discover a variety of new graphic organizers to incorporate into their teaching techniques and to provide for different learning styles.

The peer editing scores provided increased results. The researchers believed that the increase resulted from peer editing collaboration. Researchers observed students and determined the additional reasons for the increase included the familiarity of the format, more practice, and comfort with peer editing. Other students scores that remained the same may have resulted from careless work, lack of knowledge, or poor motivation by the peer editors. Students enjoyed the activity and were anxious to see their improvement and the results of doing peer editing. Researchers believed that this strategy was very successful and would continue to use it in their classrooms.

The use of a rubric for scoring student writing (see Appendix I) was well received by the researchers. It was found that each researcher interpreted the item's performance levels differently. The rubric that was used for this project has been revised as a result of this project. More precise descriptors of the performance level have been developed by site's NCA committee because field testing of the rubric. Discussions among the researchers were held to bring about understanding and uniformity of the features of the rubric. The researchers found that the computerized scoring sheet was too sensitive to stray marks and erasures. Incorrect student information resulted in

mistakes in the alignment of the first and third quarter results and analysis. This forced the researchers to re-examine and revise the computerized scoring sheets three times until accurate information was obtained. The researchers met with other grade level staff members to discuss the revised rubric, its uses and its flaws.

Goal-setting assessments (see Appendix S) received mixed reviews from the researchers. Some students did not take the assessment seriously, while others were too hard on themselves. Some students selected an area that they were proficient and researchers believed students were attempting to create a positive result. Researchers questioned whether students really focused on this goal while writing. Researchers also believed that this was too short-term of an assessment and did not transfer to other subjects or for an extended period of time. Researchers would use this intervention more often but include it as part of a student-teacher conference to establish goals and measure progress.

The project was relevant to the site because it correlated with the North Central Association accreditation writing goal. This is important because this project, its interventions, and its assessments will be used to show growth in student work from kindergarten through fifth grade for the next five years.

Researchers plan to share the process and problems of the project with the site's staff through monthly staff development meetings during the next school term. This would include graphic organizers, peer editing, cooperative learning strategies, and writing celebrations. These shared strategies and techniques should assist the site's fifth grade teachers who will be implementing IGAP writing test for the first time in 1998-1999.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Parent Letter

September 11, 1997

Dear Parents and Guardians,

This year we are participating in a Masters Program in Education from St. Xavier University. As part of this program, we are required to complete a thesis about our work with fifth grade students. The thesis will focus on writing and will include normal classroom procedures. It will attempt to show improved writing skills through the use of varied teaching strategies. These strategies will come from our integrated Scholastic Language Arts program and recent research on improving writing skills. All of this will occur during the regular school day.

If you have any concerns or questions, please feel free to call us at school ( ). Thank you for your understanding as we pursue our Masters degree.

Sincerely,

Appendix B

Teacher Writing Survey

Dear Staff,

As part of our Masters program we need your opinions about children's writing. Please address the statements by using yes or no.

1. Do you feel children enjoy writing?	Yes	No
2. Do children know how to edit?	Yes	No
3. Do children know how to revise?	Yes	No
4. Do children know how to use graphic organizers?	Yes	No
5. Do children know how to use reference materials?	Yes	No
6. Do children feel rushed for time when writing?	Yes	No
7. Do children know how to use rubrics to evaluate writing?	Yes	No
8. Do children compare their writing pieces to see improvement?	Yes	No
9. Do children have a hard time starting to write?	Yes	No
10. Do children share writing with others?	Yes	No
11. Do you have enough time for teaching writing?	Yes	No
12. Do you write yourself as the children write?	Yes	No
13. Did you have a course on teaching writing in your undergraduate program	Yes	No

Comments:

Appendix C

Pre and Post Student Writing Survey

This survey is about your feelings towards writing. Please circle your answer.

1. Are you a	Boy or	Girl?
2. Do you enjoy writing?	Yes	No
3. Do you know what o look for in editing?	Yes	No
4. Do you know how to revise?	Yes	No
5. Do you use graphic organizers?	Yes	No
6. Do you use reference materials - dictionary, thesaurus, spell checker?	Yes	No
7. Do you feel rushed for time when writing?	Yes	No
8. Do you use a rubric to evaluate your writing?	Yes	No
9. Do you compare your writing pieces to see improvement?	Yes	No
10. Do you have a hard time starting to write?	Yes	No
11. Do you share your writing with others?	Yes	No

Appendix D

Directions for Administering Pre and Post Prompts

You will have 40 minutes to write. You may wish to take the first five minutes or so to think about the topic and plan what you will write. Open your booklet and look at the first page.

It is unlined and has the word "Notes" at the top of the page. You may use this page for planning our writing or for scratch paper.

I will tell you when the first five minutes are up, but you may begin writing before then if you are ready. I will also tell you when there are only 10 minutes left so that you can read over your work and make any changes or corrections you would like. You will write in pencil on the lined pages in the booklet

It is not necessary to fill all the lined pages. You should write as much as necessary to cover the topic well. You should not rewrite our work in the booklet. You may print or write in cursive. If you finish before the time is up, close your booklet and wait quietly until I tell you what to do next. Are there any questions?

Now I will give each of you a copy of the topic you will write about. Keep this paper next to your booklet on your desk. The topic you will write about is printed on this page. Read the topic to yourself as I read it aloud. As you write, be sure to include all of the details that you think are important. State your ideas clearly and in a good order.

Now turn the topic page over. Look at the "Writer's Checklist". It has some important points to keep in mind as you write. You may use this "Writer's Checklist" while you are writing and, after you have finished, to help you go over your work. Are there any questions? Now look at the topic again, I will read it to you once again. You may begin again.

(After five minutes) You should begin writing on the lined pages if you have not already done so.

(After the next 25 minutes) There are 10 minutes left for your to finish writing, read it over, and make changes in it.

(After the next 10 minutes) Stop. Put your pencil down and close your booklet.

Appendix E

Writing Prompt

Writing Assignment

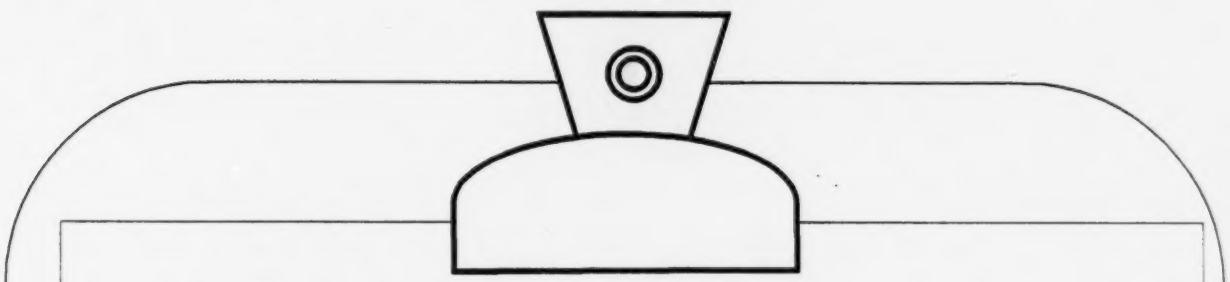
TYPE OF WRITING: Narrative

TITLE: One Summer Day

SITUATION: Think back to this past summer. Choose one day when you had an unusual experience. Describe for a friend what you did, how your felt, and what made this day special. Be sure to relate sounds, sights, smells, and feelings that you had. How did you feel at the end of the day?

Appendix F

Writer's Checklist



Writer's Check List

- ☐ Did I write about the topic?
- ☐ Did I express my ideas in complete sentences?
- ☐ Did I give enough details to explain or support my ideas?
- ☐ Did I include only those details that are about my topic?
- ☐ Did I write my ideas in an order that is clear for the reader to follow?
- ☐ Did I write a topic sentence for each paragraph?
- ☐ Did I use a capital letter at the beginning of each sentence and for all other words that should be capitalized?
- ☐ Did I use the correct punctuation at the end of each sentence and within each sentence?
- ☐ Did I spell words correctly?
- ☐ Did I print or write clearly?

Appendix G

Notes Page

NOTES

Appendix H

Writing Booklet

Appendix I

NCA Rubric

FEATURES:
1. Pre-Writing
2. Focus
3. Support & Elaboration
4. Organization
5. Conventions

TYPE OF WRITING
____ Narrative
____ Expository
____ Persuasive
____ Descriptive

PERFORMANCE LEVELS
A Absent
D Developing
AD Adquately Developed
FD Fully Developed

FEATURES	**PERFORMANCE LEVEL**
Pre-Writing Inventory:	***Mark Appropriate Level***
1. Enjoys writing	A D AD FD
2. Pretends to write	A D AD FD
3. Writes to share ideas, opinions and facts	A D AD FD
4. Recognizes letters of the alphabet	A D AD FD
5. Uses upper and lower case letters appropriately	A D AD FD
6. Uses clear spaces between words	A D AD FD
7. Forms letters correctly	A D AD FD
8. Uses graphic organizers	A D AD FD
Focus: Main Idea, Clarity	***Mark Appropriate Level***
9. Subject or main idea is clear	A D AD FD
10. Paper has an opening	A D AD FD
11. Paper has a closing	A D AD FD
12. Opening and closing statement are related	A D AD FD
Support & Elaboration: Quality of Detail or Support	***Mark Appropriate Level***
13. Use of specific detail(s), example(s), reason(s), and/or reaction(s)	A D AD FD
14. Use of second order support or elaboration	A D AD FD
Organization: Clear & Logical Structure	***Mark Appropriate Level***
15. Contains an opening	A D AD FD
16. Contains a middle	A D AD FD
17. Contains an ending	A D AD FD
18. Use of internal transitions	A D AD FD
19. Use of external transitions	A D AD FD
20. Use of appropriate paragraphing	A D AD FD
Conventions: Spelling & Mechanics	***Mark Appropriate Level***
Conventions Rating Scale:	
A = 7 or more errors D = 5 - 6 errors AD = 3 - 4 errors FD = 0 - 2 errors	
21. Uses random letters	A AD FD
22. Uses of phonetic spelling	A AD FD
23. Use of standard spelling	A D AD FD
24. Use of standard mechanics	A D AD FD
25. Uses complex sentence structure	A D AD FD

Appendix J

Writing Profile for Site School

1993 - 1994

To begin with, out focus was curriculum integration with writing. The staff development team coordinated several in-service training seminars employing s writing consultant,. Furthermore, writing strategies were presented to furnish the staff with a variety of tools to enhance student performance and teachers' understanding of state testing expectations

1994 - 1995

Another consultant assisted our expansion of writing by focusing the staff to include literature for inspiring creative writing. In addition, the staff continued their efforts to develop student and teachers' expertise in their performance of state testing skills.

1995 - 1996

As we continued to improve our writing performance in curriculum areas and state testing scores, we expanded our development by focusing specifically in certain areas and populations. To be specific, these areas included writing to learn, assisting at-risk writers, and publishing students work. Our employed consultant, provided in-service training the area mentioned above. As a result, in the spring of 1995, a fourth grade teacher, met with neighboring district teachers from two different grade schools to learn techniques for setting up our own publishing center. A committee of our teachers then proceeded to set up our center at the site school which opened in the fall of 1996. The publishing center is managed by site teachers and supported by parent volunteers.

At this time, kindergarten teachers requested that the another consultant provide training in kindergarten journal writing.

Appendix K
Publishing Center

Publishing Center

Two year building wide Staff Development Goal

Staff votes to establish writing center

Committee established

Financial support of writing center
- Staff Development funds
- Financial grant written
- _____ business partnership

Publishing Centers visited

Audio-visual storage room converted to publishing center
- Painted
- Shelves, counters, file cabinets, bulletin board, dry erase board installed

Materials purchased from Office Max, Office Depot, Metropolitan, Wal-Mart

Consultant, _____, hired

Two days of summer curriculum work completed
- One day with consultant
- One day to stock and prepare Publishing Center Materials
- _____ press Coverage

Parent sign-ups conducted at Open House
- Sixty-five parental volunteers
- Seven senior citizen volunteers

Parent Training Night – October 24
- Publishing Center packets distributed
- Pre-typing conference, typing of student material on Apples, binding of books

First year goal of one book per student published
- Long-term goal of publication of any student material

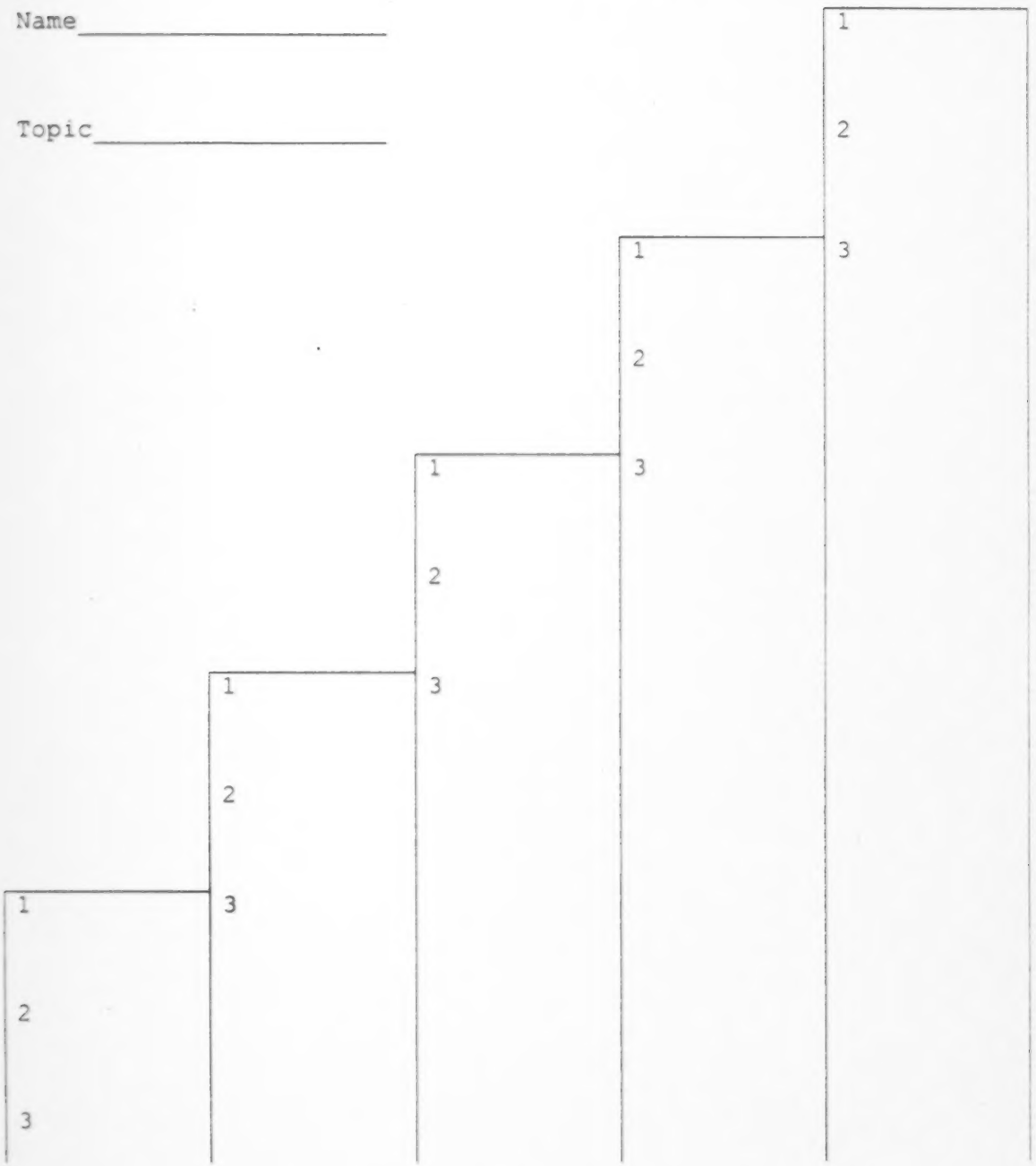
Culmination activity
- "Celebrate Writing" assembly
- Classes pair up to share books in small groups with different grade levels

Appendix L

Steps to Understanding

Name_____

Topic_____



Appendix M

Persuasive Writing Prompt

STUDENT DIRECTIONS
PERSUASIVE PROMPT

Your school district is considering the possibility of having a twelve-month school year. Some people have said that students do not need three months off in the summer because they waste a lot of time which could be spent studying and learning important things. Some people said that there is a lot of time wasted in the fall having to review because students forget over the summer. Your principal is asking students for their opinions on the subject.

Appendix N

Teacher Directions for Persuasive Prompt

TEACHER DIRECTIONS FOR ADMINISTERING PERSUASIVE WRITING PROMPT

TEACHER DIRECTIONS

1. **No prior brainstorming**
2. **Pass out booklets**
3. **Read teacher's script below**
4. **Pass out prompts and go over directions**

You will have about 60 minutes to write. You may wish to take the first 10 minutes or so to think about the topic and plan what you will write. You may use a graphic organizer, but you will have to make your own on the blank piece of paper that is provided.

You will write a persuasive piece, agreeing or disagreeing with having school 12 months a year. Write an essay to your principal in which you agree or disagree and explain your position. Decide whether you agree or disagree with the plan. Give several reasons why you agree or disagree. Explain how having three months vacation is helpful or harmful to students.

I will tell you when the first 10 minutes are up. I will also tell you when there are only 10 minutes left so that you can read over your work and make any changes or correction you would like.

You should write with a pencil on the lined pages in the booklet. You may print or write cursive.

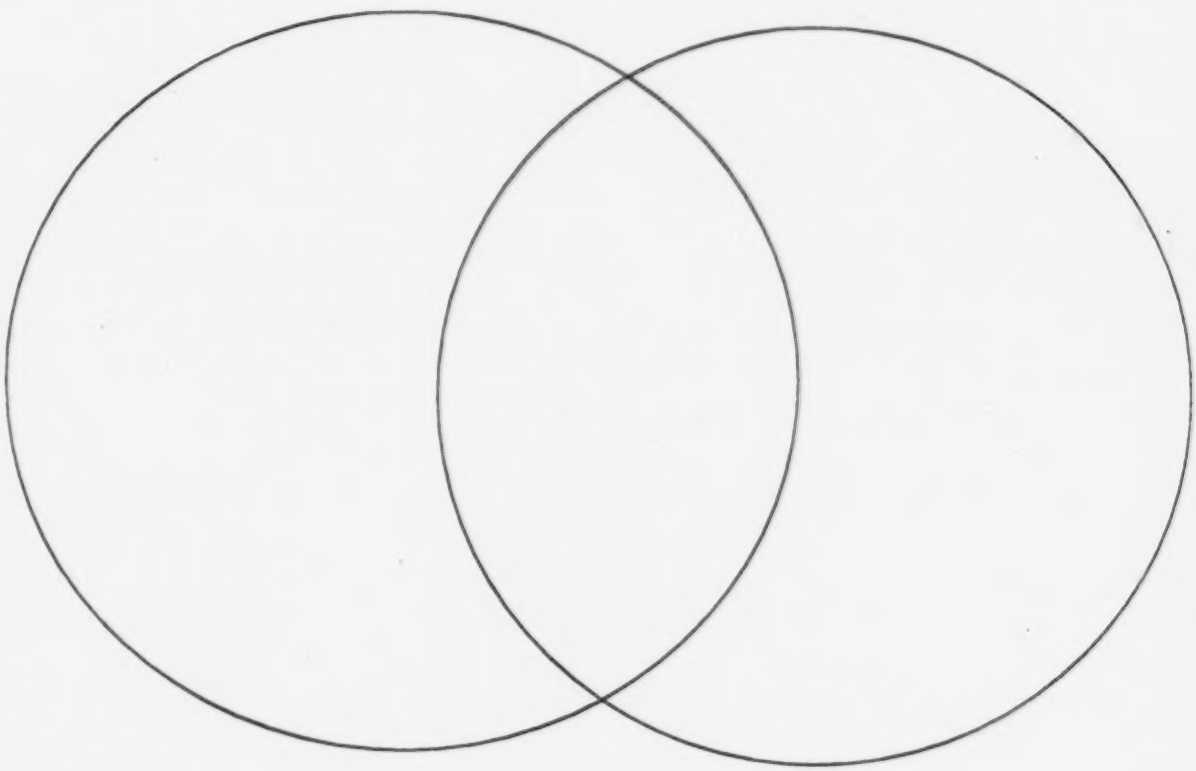
You should write as much as necessary to cover the topic well.

Appendix O

Venn Diagram

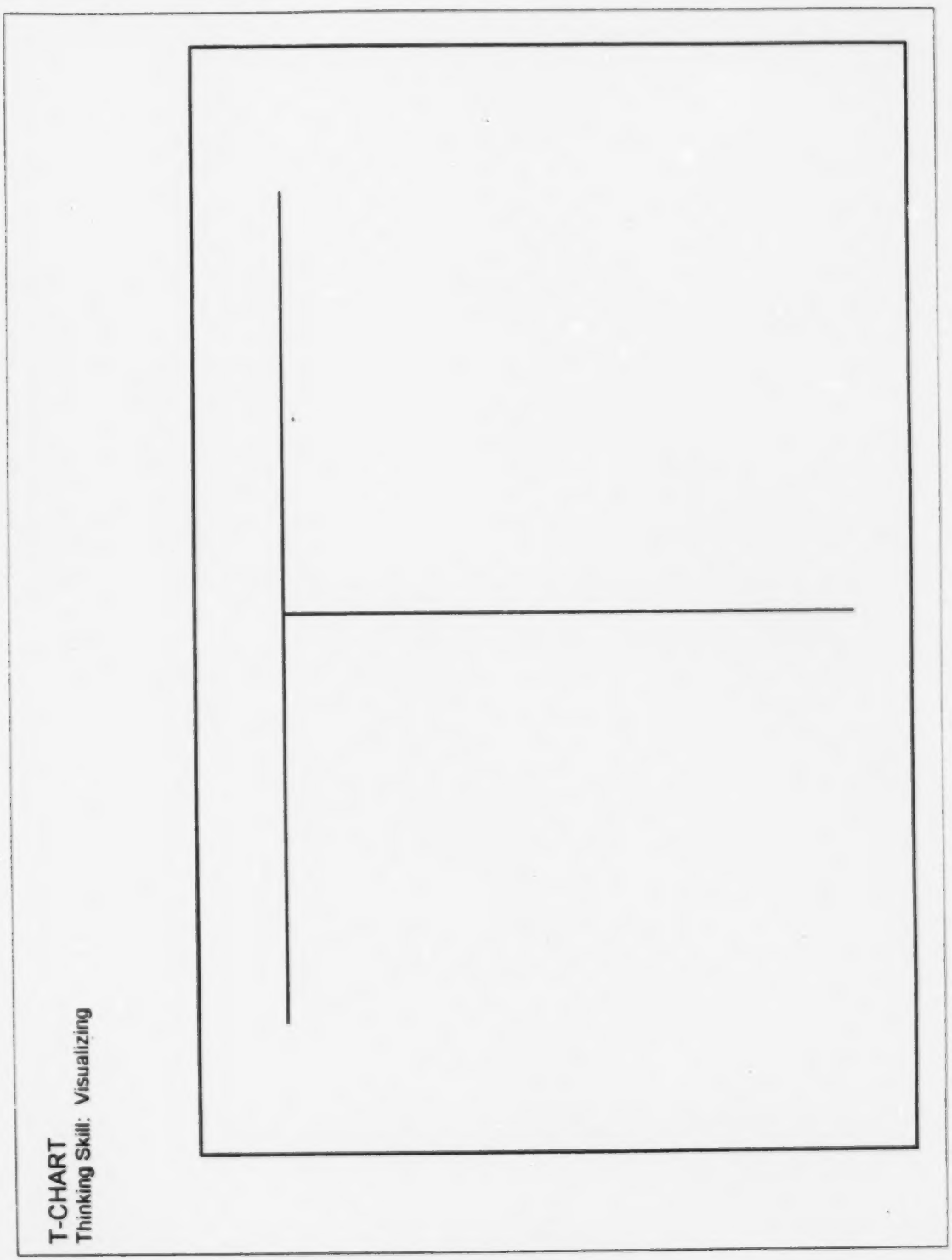
NAME_____ CLASS_____

VENN DIAGRAM



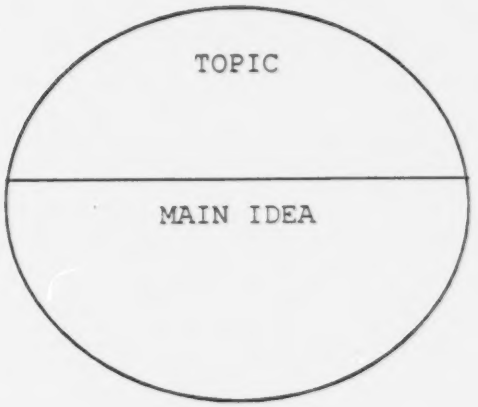
Appendix P

T-Chart 55

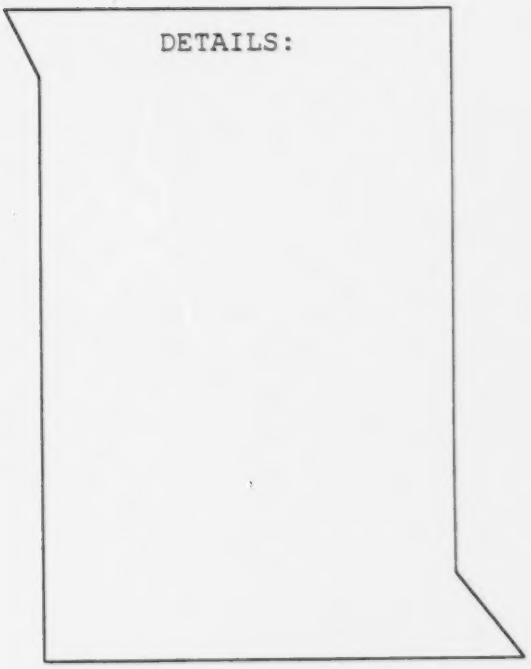


Appendix Q

I Chart



Question:



Summary_____

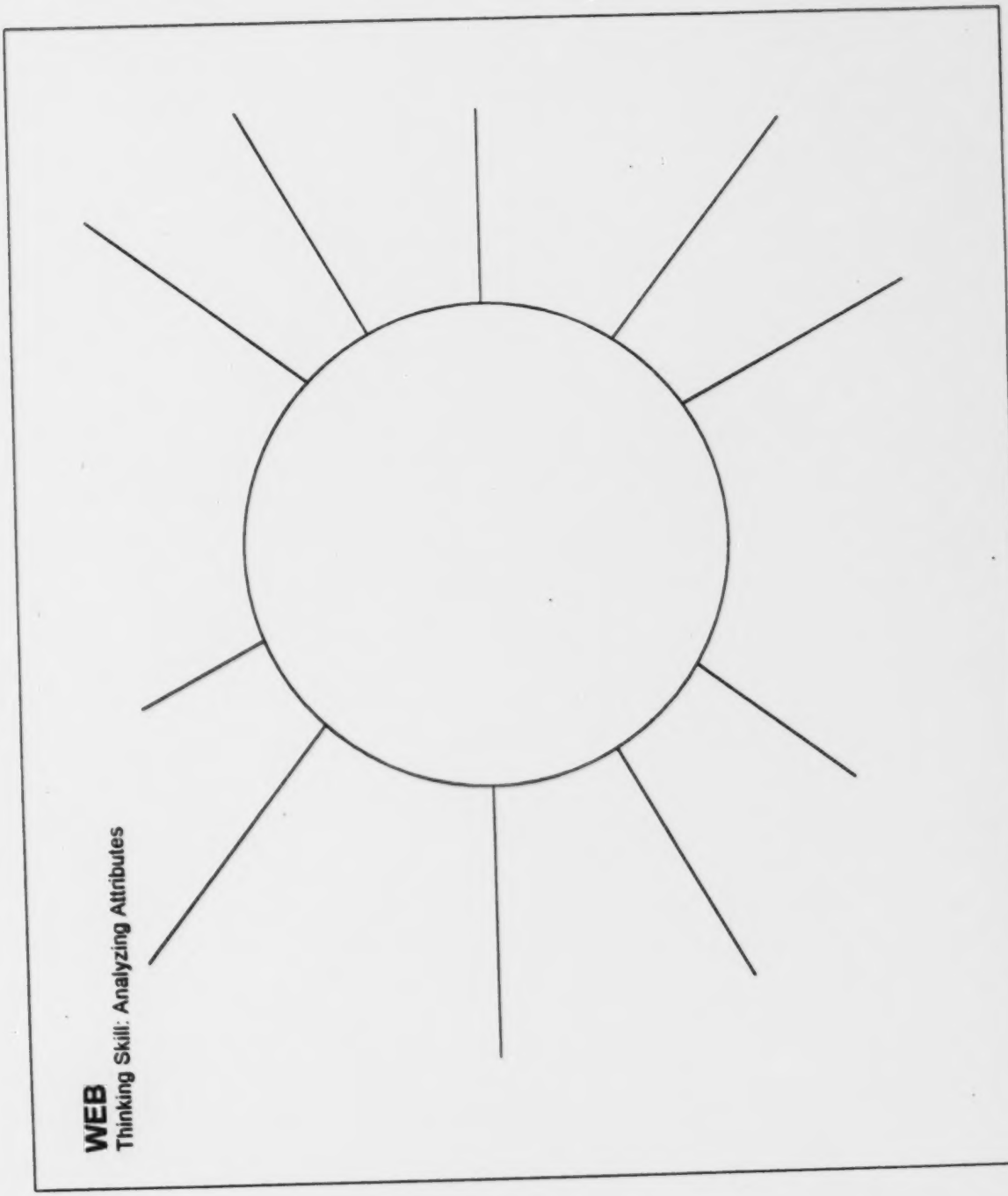
_____

_____

_____

Appendix R

Webbing



Appendix S

Student Writing Self-Assessment

Student Writing Performance:
Self-Assessment

Pre-Writing Student Self-Assessment
- Read over your current writing sample. Choose a writing goal you would like to improve.
- Fill in the "Pre" column for the goal(s) you have chosen.

Post-Writing Student Self-Assessment
- Reread the goal you chose to improve.
- Check your new writing sample to see if you have reached your goal(s).
- Fill in the "Post" column to determine if you reached your goal(s) by filling in "yes or no".

My Goal is to use...

	Pre	Post	
1. a graphic organizer.	○	○ Yes	○ No
2. a clear and logical opening in my writing sample.	○	○ Yes	○ No
3. a clear and logical ending in my writing sample.	○	○ Yes	○ No
4. correct spelling in my writing sample.	○	○ Yes	○ No
5. correct punctuation in my writing sample.	○	○ Yes	○ No
6. correct capitalization in my writing sample.	○	○ Yes	○ No
7. complete sentences in my writing sample.	○	○ Yes	○ No
8. _____	○	○ Yes	○ No

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Appendix T

Scholastic Daily Language Practice (1)

D.O.L. PLAN 5 MYSTERIES

1. she told us the bakground of the seels excape

2. the story of the femaile's ordeel will astownd them

3. they will travil to steal the ideel graep

4. you will confownd him when you reveel the vowle in the word

5. yesterday (she, her) gave the tawel by the steele door to (he, him)

Appendix U

Scholastic Daily Language Practice (2)

D.O.L. PLAN 6 MYSTERIES

1. the drought areas suround and border our state

2. according to the esay, the museum opened on june 6 1885

3. they will conttend with the weather and preetend it is sunny

4. on december 5 1995 we did colect drawings of the mammel

5. the backgrownd of the photo will astownd you but apeal to you

* Circle the verb in this sentence.